

Drug Addiction among the Youth of Darjeeling District: A Sociological Study

Abstract

Drug addiction has become one of the severe menaces all over the world, and India is no exception to that. In India, 26th June is celebrated as the 'Anti-Drug Abuse Day' every year, and a great awareness campaign has been organized nationally to reduce the magnitude of drug addiction. Irrespective of the government's initiatives, the extent of the behaviour is rising daily. The issue is very dynamic and complex in its existence. Thereby, a keen analysis of the subject is needed as it hampers the lives of the youth in most cases in India. The present study is an endeavor to know and understand drug addiction in the Darjeeling district from a sociological point of view. The region has been selected as a field for the study due to its vibrant activities concerning drug-related activities. The region under study is strategically significant and shares international and national boundaries which makes the region prone to cross-border smuggling and trade of illegal substances. The region is being used by the traffickers to store, traffic, and sell different drugs thereby, the region becomes prone towards drug-related activities.

An attempt has been made to understand the extent and pattern of drug addiction in the region under study. The researcher has reviewed several secondary literature of the existing scholarship on drug addiction to get the basic idea of drug addiction and the way the behaviour has been perceived in society historically. A review of the literature enables the researcher to find out the specific research gap for the study.

The study continues to assess the problem comparatively as the hills area and plains area of the district. To accomplish the research on the issue, the study set off some major objectives to comprehend the dynamicity of the issue in the field. The study intends to find out the specific pattern and magnitude of the behaviour based on the major causes that countenance the problem in contemporary times. Moreover, the study tries to locate the role of different factors like religious, cultural, political, and economic, as these factors were found very crucial in different research works on addiction. In drug addiction, peer groups play a vital role in the dissemination and extension of the problem, and that remains a pertinent factor which deserves a sociological analysis. The study finds causal relationships between factors that influence the problem irrespective of age, sex, and community recognition in society. Also, the study discusses the socio-economic impact of the problem on the everyday life of the respondents.

The endeavor links possible theories concerning drug addiction in contemporary times. A triangulation of theories has been employed to contextualize the present situation. Durkheim's concept of Anomie and Merton's idea of Strain helped to perceive the ideas relating to the major causes that push individuals toward drug abuse and addiction. Moreover, the study has made use of Social Learning Theories, Social and Self Control Theories, Differential Association, Liquid Modernity, and other theories to uncover the undermining issues relating to the problem. The theoretical background of the work helped in identifying major areas of the problem and also, analyzing the major dynamic factors along with their contribution to the behaviour.

Methodologically, the study has followed a qualitative approach to comprehend and to detail the issues relating to the behavior, although the quantitative approach has been

considered in some ways to represent the total respondents of the study. Both, primary and secondary data have been used in accomplishing the task. For secondary data, the study has consulted different books, journals, governmental reports, news articles, and many more to get a concrete idea. Primary data has been collected empirically with the help of different methods from the field of the study. Moreover, some methods are applied to cross-check the data and to get the actual scenario of the problem. The study has collected a total of forty case histories of the respondents from the region under study. The data of the study has been distributed in tabular form comparatively as respondents of rehabilitation centres and non-rehabilitation centres (local drug hubs). The study relied on ethnomethodological and phenomenological analysis of the behaviour of the respondents regarding drug abuse and addiction.

To understand the relation between region and drug addiction, how/why regions vary on social problems from one another, the researcher discusses the basic characteristics of the region (Strategic, Administrative, Economic, Educational, Religious, Cultural) and their contribution in influencing the problem independently. An attempt has been made to discover the relationship between the region and drug-related activities and also the ways in which the very problem is increasing with the participation of youth continuously. In searching the above-mentioned statement, many factors have been found that are essential to the issue and also trigger drug-related activities in the region.

Socio-economic background of the respondents has been analyzed on the basis of the empirical data which were collected from the field. Also, a critical overview has been placed concerning the basic background of the respondents in relation to the existing scholarship. Moreover, the study has identified major causes that intrigue individuals to

indulge themselves in drug abuse and addiction-related activities. The study has found that although causes guide people towards drug consumption initially but, eventually, drug in-takers tend to produce new causes only for their association and continuous consumption of different drugs and to justify their activity. Contextualization of the problem shows that causes push individuals to the behaviour as a gateway but concerns (pleasures) are the main urge which takes users/abusers deep into the addiction.

The findings of the thesis also say that the gendered participation in drug addiction and related activities is on the rise, and the participation of girls in the drug trade extends the path for other different crimes in contemporary times. Increasing involvement in drug addiction has a direct impact on other crimes like, sex work, murder, rape, et cetera, and they are also on the rise accordingly.

An attempt has been made to assess the structural and functional analysis of the problem of drug abuse and addiction in the present situation. The researcher has prepared two complementary diagrams to denote the functional and structural operations that push individuals toward drug abuse and indulge further in the process. Major and vital factors have been identified which work severely in the process of addiction. As in the existing scholarship, the process of addiction is neglected. Thereby, an attempt has been put forward by the current scholar to portray the whole operational analysis by presenting different elements along with their contribution to the behaviour.

The study suggests that during COVID-19, drug addiction and related activities increase due to the participation of people in the cross-border drug trade. The pandemic was the time when non-drug abusers (students and petty traders of goods and services) also participated on a large scale to earn easy money, which made the region available on

drugs for people with an addiction. During COVID-19, a section of people suffered a lot with basic survival, and another section of people suffered from boredom, anxiety, and the company of peers (whether drug addicts or non-addicts), which made the situation more complicated. Drug trafficking, smuggling, and trade made the region vibrant during the pandemic, and the participation of youth (concerning drug consumption and trade) increased significantly.

The problem of drug abuse and addiction, along with the drug traffic and trade, are also on the rise day by day in the concerned field of investigation (Darjeeling district). The study seeks to delve into all the issues which could provide a sociological understanding of the problem